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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 29 June - 5 July 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | The Turkish-Russian joint patrols continued in Idlib Governorate. Turkish and Russian armed forces reinforced their positions in Idlib Governorate. There was a decrease in the number of clashes involving Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and GoS-backed militias against armed opposition groups. Bomb attacks occurred in Afrin city, Aleppo Governorate.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Protests decreased in the region. The GoS entered into a settlement deal with a gang in As-Sweida Governorate engaged in kidnapping. ISIS attacked GoS forces in Homs Governorate. Attacks against GoS personnel and former opposition fighters continued in the region. The GoS reported the highest number of COVID-19 cases to date in territory under its control.
- **NORTHEAST** | Protests and demonstrations against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued in the northeast. Infighting among Turkish-backed armed opposition groups continued in Ar-Raqqah and Al-Hassakah Governorates. There were increased reports of forcible conscriptions conducted by the SDF. The SDF quelled a prison uprising by ISIS prisoners in Al-Hassakah Governorate. The SDF continued to face attacks from the Turkish-backed armed opposition and unidentified armed groups.

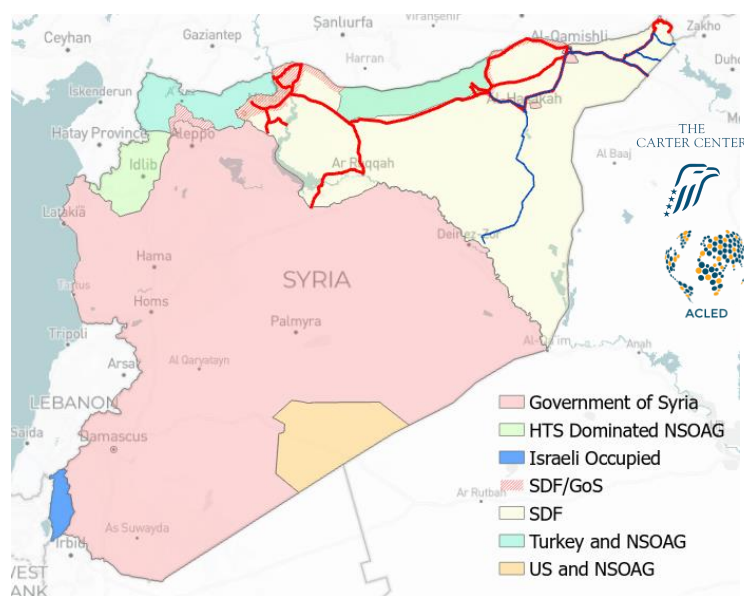


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 5 July 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

The joint patrol of Turkish and Russian armed forces along the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate continued this week. On 1 July, the 19th joint patrol took off from Turnabah in eastern Idlib Governorate and ended near Ghassaniyeh in the western outskirts of Jisr al-Shugour.² The patrol involved land vehicles as well as aerial vehicles from both parties.³ This is the first reported patrol involving both parties since 16 June when a Russian military vehicle was attacked by an improvised explosive device (IED). The Turkish-Russian joint patrols were mandated by the 5 March ceasefire agreement and are required to reach Ain al Hawr in opposition-controlled territory (see figure 2). As the joint patrols have progressed, Turkey has established additional military outposts in the to protect the patrols (see below).

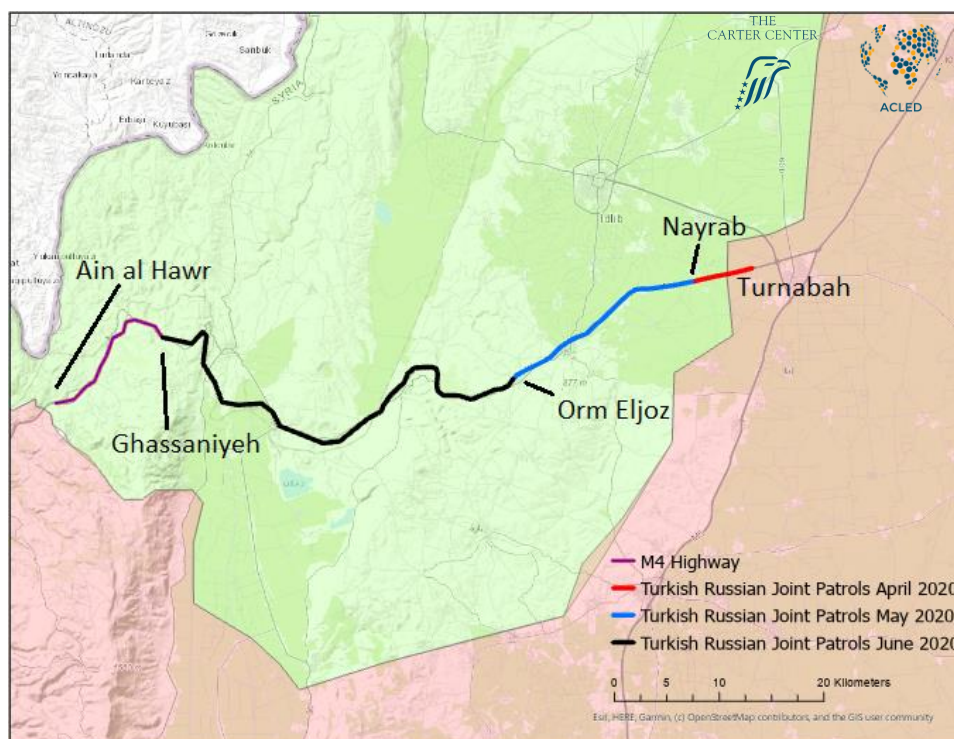


Figure 2: The Turkish-Russian Joint Patrol on the M4 Highway in Idlib Governorate. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Turkish and Russian armed forces reinforced their positions in Idlib Governorate. On 29 and 30 June, a Turkish convoy entered from the Kafr Lusin border crossing into Idlib Governorate and proceeding towards Turkish positions along the

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish dominated SDF and a variety of other groups operate in areas not under GoS control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of the country. The area along the junction of the Syrian border with Iraq and Jordan is a 55km de-confliction zone, established by the US-led coalition that also includes a number of aligned local armed groups. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLED](https://www.acled.org/).

² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/397537>

³ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkey-russia-hold-19th-joint-patrol-in-northern-syria/1895927>

frontlines. The same day, Turkish armed forces established a new base near Mhambal town by the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate. On 1, 3, and 4 July, a Russian convoy entered Menbij and headed towards the Sarin airbase in Ain al-Arab in Aleppo Governorate. The same day, Turkish military equipment and reinforcements entered Syria from the Kafr Lusin border crossing and headed towards Turkish observation posts in Idlib Governorate. On 1 July, Turkish armed forces established a military base on the outskirts of Maaret al Naasan in Idlib Governorate. In recent weeks, opposition and GoS armed forces have been fortifying their positions along the frontlines in the region.

Clashes involving Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and GoS-backed militias⁴ on the one side and armed opposition groups on the other continued this week. On 29 June, GoS armed forces clashed with armed opposition groups in the Ftireh area in southern Idlib Governorate. On 30 June, clashes between GoS armed forces and GoS-backed militias against armed opposition groups was recorded in Fleifel in Idlib Governorate. The same day, clashes between GoS armed forces, Russian-backed militias, and Iranian-backed militias⁵ on the one side and the opposition Fatah al-Mubin Operations Room⁶ were recorded in Ruwaiha in Idlib Governorate.⁷ On 1 July, GoS armed forces and GoS-backed militias clashed with armed opposition groups in Afes and Ftireh in Idlib Governorate and Miznaz in Aleppo Governorate. No advances were reported during these clashes. On 2 July, additional clashes between GoS armed forces and armed opposition groups was reported in Ftireh, Idlib Governorate. During the reporting period, 9 armed clashes were recorded, compared to 22 in the previous week.

Bomb explosions were reported in Afrin city, Aleppo Governorate. On 2 July, Turkish armed forces foiled an attempted bombing by the Kurdish Wrath of Olives Operations Room, arresting six fighters.⁸ The next day, a roadside bomb exploded in Afrin city, killing one civilian. Turkish armed forces blamed the Kurdish People's Protection Militias (YPG) for the attack.⁹ On 5 July, an IED killed one civilian in the city, which Turkish armed forces blamed on the YPG.¹⁰ Since taking control of Afrin in 24 March 2018, there have been at least 215 recorded attacks on Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

The number of protests decreased in the in the region. On 29 June, protests erupted in Sayda, Dara'a Governorate to condemn the killing of a Russian-backed Fifth Corps fighter by GoS armed forces.¹¹ The same day, civilians demonstrated

⁴ Pro-GoS or GoS-backed militias refer to armed groups that are funded or in some way supported by GoS and coordinate with or fight alongside GoS armed forces, but are not part of the state-run military.

⁵ Pro-Iranian or Iranian-backed militias refers to armed groups that are supported by Iran, like Hezbollah, and include militias from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan.

⁶ A coalition of armed opposition groups, including Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), The Turkish-backed opposition National Liberation Front, and Jaysh al-Izza.

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/397462>

⁸ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21129>

⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/398231>

¹⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/398537>

¹¹ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21080>

against President Bashar Assad in Tafas, Dara'a Governorate.¹² On 1 July, protesters called for the release of political prisoners in Dara'a City, Dara'a Governorate. Demonstrations have been ongoing since 7 June 2020 when residents started to protest against deteriorating economic conditions in As-Sweida Governorate.

On 2 July, 22 members of a gang engaged in kidnapping in Arika, As-Sweida Governorate, reconciled with the GoS. Gang members turned in their weapons after having received a guarantee that they would not be subject to a security prosecution.¹³ The settlement came after GoS armed forces increased their presence in northern As-Sweida Governorate to put pressure on various criminal organizations operating in the governorate.¹⁴

On 3-4 July, ISIS attacked GoS armed forces and GoS-backed militias in the Badia desert near the town of Al-Sukhna in eastern Homs Governorate.¹⁵ The fighting went on for 2 days, during which time, the Russian forces provided air support to GoS side. An estimated 20 GoS fighters and 31 ISIS militants were killed in the clashes.¹⁶

Attacks against GoS personnel and former opposition fighters continued in the region. On 29 June, an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by an unidentified armed group hit a GoS military vehicle near Da'el in central Dara'a Governorate. On 30 June, unidentified gunmen killed a former opposition fighter in Tal Shihab near Mzeireb in Dara'a Governorate. Two additional attacks against GoS personnel and former opposition fighters were recorded on 30 June. Unidentified gunmen killed a GoS political intelligence officer in the countryside of Damascus city. A former opposition commander was seriously injured after unidentified gunmen attacked him in Tafas town in Dara'a Governorate. On 2 July, unidentified gunmen threw an explosive at a GoS military intelligence checkpoint near Sabqa in Rural Damascus Governorate. The same day, unidentified gunmen attacked a GoS armed forces checkpoint in Talbiseh, northern Homs Governorate, killing one GoS soldier. On 5 July, a GoS armed forces officer was assassinated in Damascus city. The officer was connected to Maher Assad, brother of President Bashar Assad.¹⁷ The same day, a GoS Fourth Division commander was killed by an IED in the Wadi Barada area of Rural Damascus Governorate.¹⁸

The GoS reported the highest number of COVID-19 cases to date in territory under its control. On 5 July, the GoS reported that there were 358 cases of COVID-19 within territory it controls, an increase of 20 cases from 3 July. The same day, three new COVID-19 deaths were reported, the highest daily death toll to date in Syria.¹⁹

¹² <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21075>

¹³ <https://suwayda24.com/?p=14484>

¹⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/397822>

¹⁵ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/isis-suffers-heavy-losses-in-big-attack-on-syrian-army-troops/>

¹⁶ <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/dozens-killed-in-isis-and-regime-clashes-in-syria-monitor-says-1.1044210>

¹⁷ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21173>

¹⁸ <https://damascusv.com/archives/26441>

¹⁹ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syria-records-highest-daily-death-toll-from-coronavirus/>

This increase follows a relaxation of COVID-19 related measures from 26 May. Since the first reported COVID-19 case on 22 March, reported COVID-19 cases in GoS-controlled territory have increased (see figure 3).

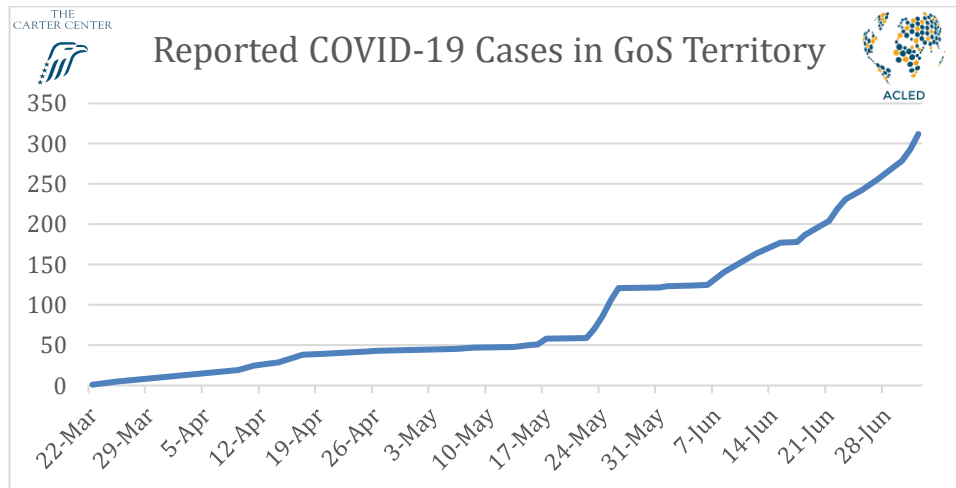


Figure 2: The number of COVID-19 cases reported in GoS-controlled territory. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Protests in the northeast have increased in recent weeks as economic conditions have deteriorated in the region. On 29 June, protesters in Gharanij town in southwestern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate called on the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to release political prisoners. On 30 June, local residents protested poor living conditions and the lack of water and electricity in Tal Hmis town in Al-Hassakah Governorate. On 1 July, residents in Hajin town held a silent protest in front of the local council facilities. The protesters demanded the release of detainees from SDF prisons, improved living conditions, and accountability regarding corruption in local councils. On 2 July, civilians in Gharanij again demonstrated for the release of political prisoners held by the SDF.

Clashes between Turkish-backed armed opposition groups continued this week. On 3 July, the Turkish-backed opposition armed groups Hamza Division and the Sultan Murad Division clashed in Ras al-Ain, Al-Hassakah Governorate. The clashes erupted after a Sultan Murad collaborator was killed during a property dispute. Turkish armed forces and the Turkish-backed opposition's National Police Forces intervened to stop the fighting. On 4 July, the Turkish-backed armed groups Levant Front and Faylaq al-Majid clashed in Tell Abiad, Ar-Raqqa Governorate. The clashes erupted after the Levant Front took over a building that served as Faylaq al-Majid's local headquarters. Fighting ceased after the intervention of Turkish-backed opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA) leaders.²⁰

There were increased reports of forced conscriptions by the SDF during the reporting period. On 30 June, SDF forces arrested a young woman in Amuda city, Al-Hassakah Governorate, and conscripted her into military service. On 1 July, the SDF's military police arrested people in Al-Hassakah city, Darbasiyah, and Tal

²⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/398301>

Tamer in Al-Hassakah Governorate for military service. Similar conscription related arrests were done on 2 July in Quamishli, Al-Hassakah Governorate, and Tell Abiad in Ar-Raqqa Governorate. Additional arrests for conscription were carried out across Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hassakah Governorates between 3-5 July.²¹

The SDF quelled a prison uprising by ISIS detainees in Al-Hassakah Governorate. On 29 June, ISIS prisoners rioted at the Al-Sina'a prison in Al-Hassakah city, Al-Hassakah Governorate. SDF closed all roads leading to the prison.²² By 30 June, the SDF were able to quell the riots. This was the third ISIS riot at the prison since April 2020.²³

Attacks against the SDF continued during the reporting period. On 29 June, the Turkish-backed opposition SNA clashed with SDF fighters in Al Nayef town, Ar-Raqqa Governorate. After the clashes, the SNA consolidated its presence in the town. The same day, unidentified gunmen killed 2 SDF fighters on the Tall Kubaybah-Haddadyiah road in Al-Hassakah Governorate. On 30 June, a SDF military vehicle was attacked by unidentified gunmen near Markada town in Al-Hassakah Governorate. On 2 July, unidentified gunmen killed a SDF fighter in al-Sikhah, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 4 July, an IED planted by an unidentified group injured several SDF fighters near a SDF checkpoint in Thiban, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Since 1 January 2020, there have been 155 recorded attacks targeting the SDF in the region (see figure 4).

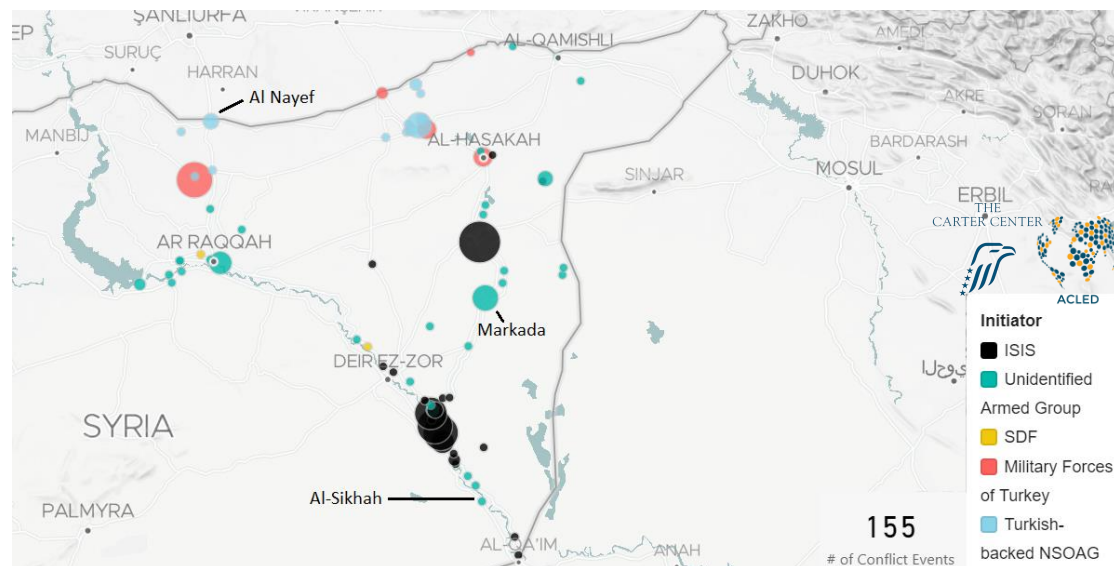


Figure 4: Attacks targeting the SDF in northeast Syria between 1 January 2020 to 4 July 2020. Largest bubble equals 14 conflict events. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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²¹ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21167>

²² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/397266>

²³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/397440>